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ABSTRACT

In the study of faith in young black children, understanding must flow from an analysis of the development of faith in Afro-American culture. To understand faith in Afro-American culture, the roots of Afro-American culture in general, and religious aspects of that culture in particular, must be analyzed. Such an analysis must begin with consideration of Afro-Americans' African heritage. In keeping with these principles, this paper discusses: (1) the African heritage; (2) features of the slave religion; (3) black faith and suffering; (4) transmission of faith through the oral tradition; (5) the role of proverb tradition in the socialization of Afro-American children; and (6) faith as taught by the hero and heroine in black children's folktales and literature. Concluding remarks emphasize that the importance of faith in aiding survival is a key factor in the Afro-American notion of faith. (RH)

THE TRANSMISSION OF FAITH TO YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN

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THE TRANSMISSION OF FAITH TO YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN

We've come this far by faith,
Leaning on the Lord;
Trusting in his Holy Word,
He's never failed us yet.
Oh, can't turn around
We've come this far by faith.

Afro-American gospel song
by Albert G. Goodson

James Fowler (1976) defines faith as a coat against the nakedness of a soul alone.

> For most of us, most of the time, faith functions so as to screen off the abyss of mystery that surrounds us. But we all at certain times call upon faith to provide nerve to stand in the presence of the abyss -- naked, stripped of life supports, trusting only in the being, the mercy and the power of the Other in the darkness. Faith helps us form a dependable "life space," an ultimate environment. At a deeper level, faith undergirds us when our life space is punctured and collapses, when the felt reality of our ultimate environment proves to be less than ultimate (p. xii).

Fowler states further that faith is a human universal and that mankind is endowed at birth with the capacity for faith. The ways in which these capacities are activated depend on the kind of environment we grow in. Faith is social and is shaped by ones community, ritual and nurture. However, faith is also shaped by divine initiatives that transcend those of the individual and other people. The manner in which tnese initiatives from the spirit or grace are recognized and imaged, or unperceived and ignored powerfully affects the shape of faith in our lives (p. xiii).

The Bible makes a linkage between hope and faith when it offers the following definition of faith: Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrew 11:1)

As we approach the study of faith in young Black children, our understanding must flow from an analysis of the development of faith in Afro-American culture. In order to understand faith in Afro-American culture, we must explore and analyze the roots of Afro-American culture in general and religious aspects of that culture in particular. Any consideration of the culture and religious experience of Afro-Americans must begin with the African heritage.

In this paper, we will begin at the beginning. We will trace the core of values that characterize Afro-American culture. These values will be demonstrated to be inextricably bound to the Black religious tradtion. These values had their genesis in the African heritage but were

shaped by the common experience of American slavery. We will identify the ways in which this perspective on faith has been transmitted to Black children generation after generation through the oral tradition and document the fact that it is active in the cosmology of contemporary Afro-Americans.

Jack Daniel and Geneva Smitherman (1976) make the point that there is a Tradtional African World View that colors the culture of Afro-Americans. Even though they acknowledge differences in the many tribes, languages, customs, physiognomies, spirits and deities that exist throughout the African continent, these are only surface variations on the deep structure themes that characterize traditional African culture.

C. Eric Lincoln (1974) states that "it was mainly their dynamic and pragmatic religion which helped the slaves survive in their new environment" (p. 311).

Leonard Barrett (1974) makes the point that there is documentation that West Africa in the fifteenth century, before the entrance of the Europeans, had already passed through several centuries of cultural development and had reached a stage comparable to the most developed countries of Europe of that period. This development was evident in all areas of human expression, but was most important in the relgious system of Africa.

Leonard maintains that the African traditional religion was the motivating force of all African peoples and it continued to be expressed by Africans in bondage. "The slave

master was able to claim the body of the slave, but the worldview of the African was nurtured in his soul, and his soul was impregnable" (p. 313). This was expressed in the spiritual, "Jordan river, chilly and cold, chills the body not the soul."

Leonard describes the African world view as being dynamic:

> The universe is a vast system consisting of God, the supreme power who created it, spirits and powers who rule over every aspect of this creation, and, at the center man. All things below man, all lower biological life was created for man, and the inanimate things serve him also (p. 313).

The whole system is alive, as presented by Leonard because it is energized by a spiritual force that emanates from the Supreme Being. Man's being depends upon maintaining a harmonious relationship between himself, his God, and nature.

However, the African does not conceive of the world as a place in which to contemplate life, he sees it as an arena for activity. Leonard makes the point that the African's aim is to live strongly. He prays for long life, health, and prosperity; the strengthening of his family, his clan and his tribe because he lives through them. The Ancestors are the guardians of posterity and men are heavily dependent upon them for all aspects of life.

Leonard judges that the pragmatism in the African

world-view finds its greatest expression in African folklore and proverbs.

> The main theme of the folk tales is the will to survive in adverse conditions. Here we find the ever-recurring theme of the weak against the strong, and here the stress is on cunning, craftiness, and speed. These folk tales gained new significance in the slavery of the New World (p. 314).

These African folk tales contain the collective wisdom of the African people. Leonard points out that the world-view of Africa is above all life affirming.

> In them we find instructions for the preservation of life, leading a moral life, living cautiously, loving God, and holding respect for the aged, as well as the wisdom of gratitude and the beauty of temperance (p. 314).

The slaves brought with them to the New World, the wisdom of their forefathers. The African culture they brought laid the foundation for Afro-American culture that was transmitted to their descendants. Leonard affirms that "this world-view found expression in the spirituals, music, dance, and the general life-style of later generations who came to be known as Afro-Americans" (p. 314).

Levine (1977) points out that retention of traditional African beliefs and practices was facilitated by the delay that occurred in the conversion of the African slaves to Christianity. There was considerable debate for over two

hundred years among whites as to whether to give their religion to their bondsmen. They were afraid that freedom would result from baptism and that time for labor would be lost, given the fact that labor was prohibited on Sunday in the Christian tradition. They also feared that the slaves would develop notions of religious equality.

This vacillation on the part of the slaveholders in Levine's view required the slaves to accommodate their African religious beliefs and practices to the demands of the harsh economic and social system they found themselves in. Accommodation was necessary because of the suppression of their freedom to worship in tradtional ways, an example of which was the prohibition against using the drum. When conversion did come, it was not at the expense of the slave's prevalent folk beliefs.

In fact, Levine makes the point that there were numerous points of intersection between the beliefs of the African and those of people from other European countries who held beliefs that the slaves could adopt or adapt without doing essential violence to their own world view. "The African practices and beliefs which had the best chance of survival in the New World were those that had European analogues, as so many of the folk beliefs did" (p. 60).

The concept of faith is particularly germaine to this discussion because there is an inextricable relationship between magic, medicine, religion and faith. Faith is particularly strong when a people feel a lack of control over

their existence. Levine points out that the absence of power helped to perpetuate the slaves' sacred universe and to intensify their search for supernatural aid and solutions.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1954) points out that:

> We find magic wherever the elements of chance and accident, and the emotional play between hope and fear have a wide and extensive range. We do not find magic wherever the pursuit is certain, reliable, and well under the control of rational methods and technological processes. Further, we find magic where the element of danger is conspicuous (p. 17).

In Levine's view, the slave's magical folk beliefs were a central and necessary part of existence. They stood beside his Christian myths and supplemented and fortified them. Both were sources of strength and release. They served to preserve their sanity. Christianity assured them that the present condition eventually would change and that retribution would come in this world and in the next. It also reinforced their feelings of dignity and self-worth. Their folk beliefs provided hope and a sense of group identification, but also provided the slaves sources of power and knowledge that were alternative to those existing in the master class.

These beliefs that were closely associated with magic and faith in the religious realm were also expressed in medical practices as well. Levine points out that

> . . . while slaves acknowledged the medical care

extended to them by their masters -- "Our white folks was good as dey knowed how to be when us got sick," Callie Elder testified --there is evidence that in doctoring as in preaching slaves frequently distrusted the whites and preferred their own doctors and remedies (p. 63).

In his book, Black self-determination: A cultural history of the faith of the fathers, V.P. Franklin (1984) argues that the shared experience of slavery served as the foundation for the "cultural value system" that was handed down from the Africans to their American-born offspring, the Afro-Americans. His book is a cultural history of the experiences that formulated the Afro-American cultural value system in the United States.

Franklin utilizes:

> the testimony and narratives of enslaved and free Afro-Americans from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, as well as Afro-American folk songs, beliefs, and religious practices, in an attempt to provide a viable explanation of the meaning and significance of self-determination, freedom, resistance and education in the lives and experiences of the masses of Afro-Americans in this society (p. 4).

There is implicit agreement among scholars (Cone, 1972, Lincoln 1974, Levine, 1977, Franklin, 1984) that analysis of constructs such as faith as they are expressed in Afro-American culture can only be properly understood when their

genesis is studied in the context of slavery.

Central in the religious expression of the slaves were the spirituals. C. Eric Lincoln (1974) wrote:

> Blacks feel more deeply than do others, and it is that broader, deeper spirituality which has enabled black people to endure. The spirituals are songs, prayers, praises and sermons. They have been mistakenly derided by those who cannot distinguish between the experience of slavery and the creative genius of a people <u>in spite</u> of slavery (p. 44).

John Wesley Work, writing in 1915 summarized the essence of the spiritual in the culture of the slave poetically:

> In the Negro's own mind his music has held, and still holds, positions of variable importance. In the darkness of bondage, it was his light; in the morn of his freedom, it was his darkness, but as the day advances, and he is being gradually lifted up into a higher life, it is becoming not only his proud heritage, but a support and powerful inspiration. The songs of the slave were his sweet consolation and his messages to Heaven, bearing sorrow, pain, joy, prayer, and adoration. Undisturbed and unafraid, he could always unburden his heart in these simple songs, pregnant with faith, hope, and love (p. 110).

V.P. Franklin (1984) points out that Afro-Americans created their own version of Christianity. The southern plantation encompassed two worlds, one the master's and one

the slave's. "The gospel of the oppressor taught obedience and submission, and it was rejected by the enslaved. The gospel of the oppressed spoke of freedom, the ultimate justice of God, and His support for His chosen people" (p. 67).

Levine (1977) points out that not only did slaves believe that they were the chosen people of God, but there is evidence that many felt that their owners would be denied salvation. He cites the story told of a slave's reaction to the the news that he would be rewarded by being buried in the same vault with his master: "Well massa, one way I am satisfied, and one way I am not. I like to have good coffin when I die (but) I fraid, massa, when the debbil come take you body, he make mistake, and get mine" (p. 35).

Features of the Slave Religion

There are certain themes identified by Levine that characterize the religion of the slaves that inform our study of faith faith in the contemporary Afro-American community.

1. The God the slaves sang of was neither remote nor abstract, but as intimate, personal and immediate as the gods of Africa had been:

   ("O when I talk I talk with God," "Mass Jesus is my bosum friend," "I'm goin' to walk with (talk with, live with, see) King Jesus by myself, by myself," were refrains that echoed through the

spirituals) p. 3.

2. Descriptions of the Crucifixion communicate a sense of the actual presence of the singers:

("Dey pierced Him in the side . . . Dey nail Him to the cross . . . Dey rivet His feet . . . Dey hanged Him high . . . Dey stretched Him wide . . ."

Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, --tremble, --tremble,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord) p. 37.

3. The slave's Bible was constructed primarily from the books of Moses in the Old Testament and of Revelations in the New. All that lay between. even the life of Jesus, they rarely cared to read or hear.

The lives of Daniel, David, Joshua, Jonah, Moses, and Noah struck the imagination of the slaves because they experienced deliverance in <u>this</u> world. Over and over their songs dwelt upon the spectacle of the Red Sea opening to allow the Hebrew slaves past before inundating the mighty armies of Pharoah. They lingered delightedly upon the image of little David humbling great

Goliath with a stone -- a pretechnological victory which postbellum Negroes were to expand upon in their songs of John Henry.

They retold in endless variation the stories of the blind and humbled Samson bringing down the mansions of his conquerors; of the ridiculed Noah patiently building the ark which would deliver him from the doom of a mocking world; of the timid Jonah attaining freedom from his confinement through faith (p. 50)

The parallels between these Old Testament figures and their plight as slaves was clear. Levine quotes, "O my Lord delivered Daniel," the slaves observed and responded logically: "O why not deliver me, too?"

He delivered Daniel from de lion's den,
Jonah from de belly ob de whale,
And de Hebrew children from de fiery furnace,
And why not every man? (p. 51).

4. Although Jesus was omnipresent in the spirituals, it was not the Jesus of the New Testament of whom the slaves sang. He was Jesus transformed into an Old Testament warrior.

("Mass Jesus" who engaged in personal combat with

the devil; "King Jesus" seated on a milk-white horse with sword and shield in hand, "Ride on, King Jesus," "Ride on conquering King," "The God I serve is a man of war") (p. 43).

This Old Testament and New Testament Jesus was eventually merged with the advent of Black Theology in the 1960's. James Cone (1969) in his book, Black theology and Black power, declared that "Jesus is God Himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relationship with God." He quoted Jesus' definition of his ministry:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,,
> To set at liberty those who are oppressed,
> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.
>
> Luke 4:18-19, RSV

Black Faith and Suffering

James Cone (1972) raises a central question in the theology of the slave:

> If God is omnipotent and in control of human history, how can his goodness be reconciled with human servitude? If God has the power to deliver black people from the

evil of slavery as he delivered Moses from Pharoah's army, Daniel from the lion's den, and the Hebrew children from the fiery furnance, why then are black slaves stil subject to the rule of white masters? (p. 58)

Cone argues that the slaves do not really question the justice and goodness of God. They affirm that God is righteous and will vindicate the poor and the weak. The singers of the spirituals are concerned about the faithfulness of the community in a world full of trouble. They do not wonder about whether God is just and right, they are concerned that the sadness and pain of the world will cause them to lose faith in the gospel of God.

The slaves faced the reality of the world, "ladened wid trouble, an' burden'd wid grief," but they believed that they could go to Jesus and get releif. They appealed to Jesus not so much to remove the trouble, (although they wanted it removed), but to keep them from "sinkin' down."

Oh Lord, Oh, My Lord!

Oh, My Good Lord! Kee, me from sinkin' down.

Oh, Lord, Oh, My Lord!

Oh, My Good Lord! Keep me from sinkin' down (p. 63).

The songs of the slaves affirmed the knowledge that "trouble don't last always." They also sang, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, A long way from home"; but Cone notes, they were confident that Jesus is with them and has not left them completely alone (p. 63).

A preoccupation in the spirituals seemed to be, according to Cone, the threat that the present realities of despair and loneliness would disrupt the community of faith. They feared the agony of being alone in a world of hardship and pain.

I couldn't hear nobody pray,
Oh, I couldn't hear nobody pray.
Oh, way down yonder by myself,
And I couldn't hear nobody pray (p. 64).

The spirituals lamented the loss of community and felt that this constituted the major burden. They felt that the suffering was not too much to bear if you had brothers and sisters to go down in the valley and pray with you.

The focus of many slave songs on going home was interpreted by Cone as an affirmation of this need for community. Home was the place where mother, father, sister and brother had gone.

> To be sure, the slave wanted to make it to heaven so that he could put on his "golden slippers and walk all over God's heaven"; he wanted to see the "pearly gates" and the "golden streets"; and he wanted to "chatter with the Father, argue with the Son" and "tell un 'bout the world (he) just come from." But most of all he wanted to be reunited with his family which had just been broken and scattered in the slave marts (p. 65).

Cone notes further that there were not direct attacks upon God in the spirituals. If the slaves truly believed

that God was in control of history, why were they silent about his neglect to end slavery? The answer is that not all slaves had an unquestioning faith in God. Cone and Levine identify open rebellion against God that is exemplified in secular music (the blues).

Sterling Brown (1969) reports that blacks sang:

I don't want to ride no golden chariot;
I don't want no golden crown;
I want to stay down here and be,
Just as I am without one plea.

They also sang:

Our father, who is in heaven,
White man owe me eleven and pay me seven,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
And if I hadn't took that, I wouldn't had none
(pp. 215, 216).

Cone analyzes that the "theological assumption of Black slave religion as expressed in the spirituals was that slavery contradicts God and that he will therefore liberate Black people" (p. 73). The slaves were keenly aware of their oppression and lack of freedom. However, they felt that the same God who delivered the Israelites would deliver them. A central theme in Black slave religion and in the development of faith was of God's involvement in history and his liberation of the oppressed in bondage.

When the slaves sang,

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down,

Oh, yes, Lord!

Sometimes I'm almost to the ground,

Oh, yes, Lord!

they were exemplifying the fact that God was always with them and that "trouble would not have the last word" (p. 74).

Cone contends that the slaves knew that God is in control and would liberate them. This was expressed when they sang:

Do, Lord, remember me.

Do, Lord, remember me.

When I'm in trouble,

Do, Lord, remember me.

When I'm low down,

Do, Lord, remember me.

Oh, when I'm low down,

Do, Lord, remember me (p. 74).

V.P. Franklin (1984) points out that the Afro-American cultural vision was nurtured in slavery. At the end of slavery, viable Black-controlled institutions were created that were geared specifically to the needs of the Afro-American community. The resistance against oppression was expressed during and after slavery in flight and migration (p. 204).

Though emancipation resulted in a change in the legal status of the majority of Afro-Americans, it did not bring about a change in the core of cultural values within the

Black community. Freedom did not bring about any material change in status, so it did not change the cultural values.

Franklin quotes Patsy Mitchner, a former slave interviewed in the 1930s, who compared slavery and freedom to two snakes, both of them "full of pisen" (poison). Slavery was a "bad thing," but freedom "of de kin we got wid nothin' to live on was bad (too) . . . Both bit de nigger, an' dey was both bad" (p. 106).

Franklin maintains that

> Under slavery, Afro-Americans valued survival with dignity, resistance against oppression, religious self-determination, and freedom. After emancipation, they continued to hold these ideals; and freedom, rather than being an end in itself, became a means for achieving other cultural goals that developed within the slave and free black communities (p. 146).

Transmission of Faith Through The Oral Tradition

We come now to the central issue of this paper which is the transmission of faith to young children. I have chosen to approach this process from the perspective of the transmission of faith through the culture rather than from the perspective of the development of faith in young children.

It is almost so obvious that it is unnecessary to point out the fact that there is virtually no empirical or conceptual literature to guide this inquiry. The process of

faith development in Black children must await empirical investigations. However, those investigations might be informed by the aspect that it is possible to explore in this paper.

In the previous section, we reviewed the substance of the religion of Afro-Americans that shaped the expression of faith. In this section, we will examine the mechanisms by which that faith was transmitted to each succeeding generation.

Ella Mitchell (1986) has outined the cultural vehicles that enabled the slaves and freedmen to transmit cultural values that included faith. She marveled as a child over the eloquent exegesis of her two grandmothers who made magnificant comments on the Bible. She wondered how they could have gleaned such insights, being barely literate, not having had the benefit of a printed curriculum or trained church school teachers.

She grew to understand that the oral tradition in Black culture had been the vehicle for absorption of religious insights. This point coincides with one made by Levine (1977) when he pointed out that even when literate, the slaves favored the songs and prayers from their oral tradition over those contained in hymn and prayer books:

> When Baptist Negroes attended the church of their masters, or when their mistress sang with them, they used hymn books, but in their own meetings they often made up their own words and tunes. They said their

songs had 'more religion than those in the books' (p. 44).

Mitchell points out that the slaves found it necessary to make adaptations in their traditional ways of communicating because of the oppression of slavery. Drumming was suppressed, for example. However, the descendants of Africa had a wide variety of cultural vehicles for transmitting their culture.

Storytelling was an extremely lively and popular artform used in teaching. The story that was written by Alex Haley into his bestselling book, Roots is an example of the way important historical information was transmitted intergenerationally through the oral tradition (p. 95). Audience participation was expected and the stories were enlivened by the mixing in of poetry and music, and even dance and drumming.

These performances might serve any number of very practical functions, "such as a dispute to be settled, a bargain to be driven, a child to be corrected, or a friend to be advised of the error of his/her ways. To say nothing of work made easier by singing, and fields thus converted into classrooms with 'live entertainment' (p. 96).

Proverbs were a poetic art form with poetic beauty. They peppered spontaneous discussions and served as pearls of wisdom for the survival of the extended family/tribal unit.

Mitchell stresses that there was no way of escaping this

ingenious educational system because the children were surrounded by the lessons of their ancestors, dead or living in such a natural way that they didn't recognize it as a lesson!

Traditional African religious gatherings were forbidden, and the authorized worship that was supervised by the slaveholders was so unsatisfying, that the slaves went underground to authentically worship.

Likewise, they developed instructional and socializing techniques for their children that were difficult to squelch. Mitchell points out that parents were required to work from "can to cain't' (sunup to sundown) so the task of transmitting the culture fell to the elderly grandparents who cared for and taught the small children, too young to work. "Until they were large enough to work, there was plenty of time to listen to tales and take advantage of the peak learning years" (p. 99).

The elderly performed the traditionally African task of educating the small children. When the children went to the fields, their education into the culture continued with the singing of spirituals, work songs, telling of stories, proverbs and folktales.

There was no effort on the part of the slaveholders to control the activity in the cabins after sundown. This was a period of time that the slave could use for reading the Bible or when that was impossible because of illiteracy, telling stories and transmitting meaning and comfort.

Mitchell points to the numerous slave narratives that "attest to the fact that slave children were exceptionally well trained in devious ways of coping with masters, and in Bible wisdom, prayer and trust" (p. 99).

An important aspect of the slave child rearing system that is described by Mitchell was closely shared living or enforced intimacy. This was very analogous to the intimacy of the small African village. She points out that the belief systems of Afro-Americans were more "caught than taught".

> Thus, slave children got their cues for coping by watching their parents and other significant adults at very close range. They were together in cotton and corn fields, in small cabins and in the highly restricted life of the slave quarter. Persons were so close that, blood relations or no, one had to treat all as persons and indeed as kin. Training for coping with tragic mistreatment was thus handed down most effectively with no formal instruction, but lots of casual oral communication (p. 101).

Franklin (1984) tells of an effort made by an abolitionist, John Miller McKim to question a slave about how slave songs originated.

> I asked one of these blacks -- one of the most intelligent of them -- where they got these songs. "Dey make 'em, sah.' 'How do they make them?' After a pause, evidently casting about for an explanation, he said: 'I'll tell you it's dis way. My master

call me up, and order me a short peck of corn and a hundred lash. My friends see it, and is sorry for me. When dey come to de praise-meeting that night dey sing about it. Some's very good singers and know how; and dey work it in -- work it in, you know, till they get it right, and dat's de way'. A very satisfactory explanation; at least so it seemed to me (p. 45).

Mitchell gives an example of the courage that was exhibited by a little slave girl who, at the age of eight years old saw her mother cruelly beaten and sent away. However, she later reported having accepted her mother's admonitions upon her departure and having carried them out with calm resolve. Because of the mother's faith and unflinching personal dignity, the child accepted the message that this was the way life had to be. She followed her mother's example which had been given to her in an intimate circle of loving adults.

Self-esteem is another value that is closely related to faith and that was taught and learned in the intimacy of the slavery experience. Mitchell points out that "the lesson was learned so well that despite the ravages of dehumanization, very few slaves ever gave up and fully accepted the servile image thrust upon them" (p. 101).

Even though there was precious little time for any adults save the elderly to spend with them, love was lavished on babies and children. John W. Blassingame (1972) notes:

Since slave parents were primarily responsible for

training their children, they could cushion the shock of bondage for them, help them understand their situation, teach them values different from those their masters tried to instill in them, and give them a referent for self-esteem other than their master (p. 79).

Mitchell notes correctly that the message of self-respect and psychic survival could not be communicated openly. However, her "caught-not-taught" process was especially useful. "Casual conversation and example could quietly nourish healthy self awareness in the hearts of even the youngest children" (p. 102).

Another important contextual variable in the life of the slave that Mitchell highlights is the power of messages between children, parents and other adults because of the urgency of the situation. Children learned early that they were surrounded by danger and potential death. "The gravity of their plight was obvious, and slave parents dared not try to protect their offspring from hard reality. The best evidence of this fact is the sophistication among small children in dealing with situations where survival was at stake." (p. 103). The sterotype of slave children as happy-go-lucky is way off the mark.

A happier aspect of slave child rearing that Mitchell describes was the more typical formal religious instruction. Whether the slaves could read or not, Bible teaching was the closest thing they could get to formal training. Such

training was regarded not only as spiritual food, but also as a means of uplift and improvement of their condition.

Franklin (1984) has identified the drive toward education as a key cultural value in the minds of Afro-Americans as illustrated in the following folk song:

> When I done been 'deemed en done been tried,
> I'll sit down side de lamb.
> Can't you read? Can't you read?
> When I done been ter heaven den,
> I can read my title clean.
> I's goin' ter git my lesson,
> I's goin' ter read,
> I's goin ter read my title clean (p. 147).

At the turn of the century, W.E.B. DuBois (1968) argued that:

> We believe in work. We ourselves are workers, but work is not necessarily education. Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be and will fight against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have the right to know, to think, to aspire (p. 236).

The unifying thread in the vehicles of socialization that Mitchell describes is the oral tradition brought to the New World from Africa. Stories such as the Brer Rabbit

stories were told to socialize Black children in how to outfox a system that was oppressing them. The Brer Rabbit stories were told to prepare Black children to survive the hardships of life in America.

The oral tradition continued to transmit Black culture even after emancipation. The enforced intimacy of slavery did not change dramatically under sharecropping or even urban living for the freedmen. There was a new emphasis on formal education: reading, writing and arithmetic. However as Mitchell points out,

> . . . this latter did not take the place of the oral tradition in the deeper matters of how to cope in oppression and the development of an adequate belief system. In fact, formal education itself was often fused or blended with oral traditional forms of instruction in many creative ways (p. 105).

The Proverb Tradition in Socializing Afro-American Children

While there is no attempt to argue that proverbs are exclusively found in African and Afro-American culture, they are in keeping with a very strong African tradition. Jack Daniel (1979) points out that many African scholars have observed that the proverb is perhaps the richest and most plentiful literary device found in Africa. Proverbs have served to preserve religious principles and transmit folk wisdom across generations. Daniel states:

There is practically no such thing as a traditional

African child who has not been raised on a steady diet of what "they say." And throughout Black America, there are many Blacks who use these old sayings to help raise their children by giving oral summations of life's many lessons.

The suggestion is made here, that important folk wisdom about faith is transmitted to Black children through proverbs that helps them make sense out of the universe and achieve a sense of serenity as they must cope with events they cannot control.

Daniel et. al. (1987) have identified five significant areas for the analysis of proverbs:

1. Proverbs are an index of cultural continuity and interaction.
2. Proverbs are significant in the socialization process -- how do Black parents utilize proverbs to guide the thought and action of their children in a hostile environment, in contradistinction to other child-rearing practices?
3. Proverbs are central to mental development and abstract thinking and reasoning -- training in proverbs can supplement formal education, particularly in the area of critical thinking.
4. Proverbs are significant rhetorical devices in arguments, debates, verbal dueling, and other interaction contracts where persuasion and manipulation of the rhetorical situation are

paramount.

5. Proverbs are indices of cultural assimilation.

Listed below are examples of proverbs compiled by Daniel (1979) that transmit wisdom that are pertinent to faith. These are gleaned from hundreds of proverbs that address a wide range of subjects. They are listed in the categories assigned by Daniel:

Human Control and Responsibility

1. The more you stir mess, the more it stinks.
2. If you fall, don't wallow.
3. If we send no ships out, no ships will come in.
4. If you don't climb the mountain, you can't view the plain.
5. If you can't take it, you can't make it.
6. If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.
7. Take life as you find it, but don't leave it the same.
8. Games can't be won unless they are played.
9. When things get tough, remember that it's the rubbing that brings out the shine.
10. Where there's a will there's a way.
11. Stumbling blocks may be carved into stepping stones.
12. Necessity is the mother of invention.

Natural Relationships

13. What is done in the dark will come to light.
14. The darkest hour is just before the dawn.

15. A place for everything, and everything in its place.
16. Where there is smoke, there is fire.
17. What goes around, comes around.
18. What goes up must come down.
19. Cream rises to the top.
20. A little light in a dark place can serve a large purpose.
21. Every dog will have his day.

The Inevitability of the Good with the Bad

22. You must take the bitter with the sweet.
23. Life is not a bed of roses.
24. Every good thing has to come to an end.
25. You can't be the salt of the earth without smarting some.
26. Easy come, easy go.
27. You can't eat your cake and have it too.
28. You have to crawl before you walk.
29. Things that are hard to bear are sweet to remember.
30. Into each life some rain must fall.
31. Games can't be won unless they are played.

Faith Taught by the Hero/Heroine in Black Children's Folktales and Literature

An important source of faith to Black children is found in folktales and children's literature that socializes Black children to achieve power in the midst of a powerless

community. The Brer Rabbit story stars an animal trickster with clear parallels between his and the fox' status and that of the slave and the slaveholder. There are also numerous folktales that star the slave as trickster.

Additionally, there is a body of literature that features heroes from the mythical John Henry to Jack Johnson, to Joe Louis who stood up to society and refused to accept the "place" reserved for Afro-Americans.

A vast amount of literature geared to Black children falls into the contributionism category. This literature tells the stories of real life Black heroes and heroines such as Jackie Robinson, Marian Anderson, and Booker T. Washington who emerged from humble beginnings, suffered racial indignities, but managed to triumph and become achievers.

These stories transmit the message to Black children that there is a great deal of quicksand and many landmines on the road to becoming a Black achiever in America. However, they also transmit the message that it is possible to overcome these obstacles. These stories help Black children de-personalize oppression when they encounter it and enable them to place their personal difficulties into the context of the overall Black liberation struggle.

I am reminded of an occasion when I was confiding to my minister the despair of Black students upon encountering racism in a university setting. He asked me to remind them of what Dr. W.E.B. DuBois must have experienced at Harvard in 1896. I was speechless. He had quickly evoked the Afro-

American tradition in which I was raised and required that these students fall back on the faith that has brought us as a people this far along the way. It is my contention that it is the proverbs, the folktales, and more recently, the heroes and heroines that are taught during Black History celebrations that keep Black children grounded in the Afro-American tradition of faith.

A key to the Afro-American notion of faith is its importance in facilitating survival. Nowhere in Afro-American literature is the notion of survival through faith transmitted more effectively than in the classic poem by Langston Hughes (1926):

Mother to Son

Well son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor --
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' On,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.

So, boy, don't turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it kinder hard.
Don't you fall now --
For I'se still goin', honey.
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no
crystal stair.

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